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AUTHOR Ronk, Donald E.
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the educational background of Vietnamese Amerasians and their Vietnamese peers in the Philippine Refugee Processing Center. Results indicate that Amerasians have significantly less education and a higher illiteracy rate than their peers, while half-siblings of Amerasians do not differ significantly in schooling from youth not related to Amerasians, suggesting that at some point, educational discrimination occurs for Amerasians. Afro-Amerasians had significantly less schooling and higher illiteracy than any peer group, also suggesting discrimination in education. Male Amerasians had a higher illiteracy rate than females in this cohort, while male Afro-Amerasians have more schooling than female Afro-Amerasians. It is concluded that Amerasians have suffered educational and personal disadvantage, often severe, and are more likely to have more difficulty entering mainstream life in the United States than others. They are in great need of special educational assistance. Of all groups, Afro-Amerasians have the greatest need for educational, psychological, and social assistance. (MSE)

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EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGES OF VIETNAMESE AMERASIANS IN COMPARISON TO VIETNAMESE PEERS ENROUTE TO THE UNITED STATES

Donald E. Ronk

International Catholic Migration Commission (IESL/CO)

Morong, Bataan

Philippines

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Running head: Educational Disadvantage of Vietnamese Amerasians in Comparison to Vietnamese Peers Enroute to the United States

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ABSTRACT

Vietnamese Amerasians currently enroute to the United States through the Philippines appear to their educators to have significantly less education and a higher rate of illiteracy than their non-Amerasian peers from Viet Nam, hence at greater risk of failure in school and/or entry to main-stream American society. Comparative studies of Amerasians, matched systematically with peer groups, shows conclusively that educational disadvantage is is the case, also creating evidence that Amerasians were discriminated against in education in Viet Nam. Approximately two years difference in schooling exists between non-Amerasian Vietnamese, including half-siblings of Amerasians, and Amerasian youths. Afro-Amerasians are even further removed from their peers educationally. When matched with the finding that Amerasians have higher expectations of America, including in education, than their peers, it is concluded that Amerasians are more likely to encounter debilitating stress and/or require greater assistance than is now given in overcoming their educational disadvantage.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Vietname Amerasians 14-16.5 years old have significantly less education than do their peers who are not Amerasians and a significantly higher illiteracy rate.

2. PASS Amerasian years of schooling does not differ significantly from Amerasian youths in ICMC's adult classes.

3. There is no significant difference between the years of schooling of fully Vietnamese half-siblings of Amerasians and youths not related to Amerasians.

4. Because there is no significant difference as stated in number three, one must conclude discrimination at some level precluded Amerasians, on the average, from gaining schooling commensurate with their ages.

5. The illiteracy rate of half-siblings of Amerasians and of Amerasians is the same, indicating that those half-siblings who did attend school did so for sufficiently long to overcome the illiteracy rate among their peers.

6. Afro-Amerasians at PASS have significantly less schooling and a significantly higher illiteracy rate than do any peer grouping at PASS.

7. Afro-Amerasian adults have significantly less years of school and a significantly higher illiteracy rate than all groupings of adult peers.

8. It appears conclusive that Afro-Amerasians as a group were more discriminated against in education than Amerasians in general.

9. Male Amerasians have a higher illiteracy rate than do females, the opposite of non-Amerasians from first asylum camps.

10. Male adult Afro-Amerasians have a significantly higher level of years of school than do their female Afro-Amerasian peers, which is not the case among Amerasians in general.

11. The fully Vietnamese half-siblings of Afro-Amerasians have significantly more years of schooling than their Afo-Amerasian half-siblings.

12. Fully Vietnamese half-siblings of Afro-Amerasians have significantly less schooling than do the Vietnamese half-siblings of Amerasians in general.

IMPLICATIONS IN SUMMARY

1. Amerasians, in general, have not in recent years gained their self-esteem from the classroom. They have been out of it too long; the continuum of schooling has been broken. Their sense of self-worth has far more likely come from employment in Viet Nam, no matter how trivial that employment may appear on the surface. Expecting them to compete with those for whom the continuum has not been broken and with far more years of school is not just a vain expectation in general but one fraught with considerable psychological danger for Amerasian youths.

2. Amerasians have, at the mean age of 18.8 years, had so little formal schooling on the averages that it is almost inconsequential and certainly does not bode well for them, as a group, re-entering and/or continuing in school in the U.S..

3. In comparison to first asylum, and perhaps their own half-siblings, Amerasians will almost certainly encounter greater frustration entering into mainstream America, finding they are even less equipped either for education or the work force, and in the long-run, the latter is very dependent upon educational achievement. (The Felsman, et al, 1989 study notes that Amerasians have, in fact, higher expectations of the U.S. than do first asylum youths.)

4. Amerasians in general, and other refugee youths past puberty and still not fully adult, with minimal (less than five years of) schooling, and particularly those illiterate in their

native language, are in need of very special educational assistance, including counseling, so as not to be overwhelmed by the frustration they must surely encounter in America. That assistance should start at the PRPC.

5. Of all samplings dealt with in this study, the most glaring need for special assistance is obviously Afro-Amerasians. On more counts than simply education, the Felsman, et al, study sees them in the greatest jeopardy upon entering the U.S., educationally, psychologically, racially.

In 1984 the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) in Morong, Bataan, Philippines received it first small group of Vietnamese Amerasians in transit to the United States. In the past five years several thousand have spent seven months in the Center studying English and elements of U.S. culture in several training programs funded by the U.S. State Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement and conducted by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). At this writing there are about 2,500 Amerasians in the PRPC.

* * * * *

In order to better understand the tables and discussion to follow, the following terms are given broad definition.

VIETNAMESE AMERASIAN: The child resulting from sexual union between an American citizen and a Vietnamese citizen and raised in the latter's country and culture. Theorectically there can be children resulting from union between American women and Vietnamese men but such an Amerasian situation has never been encountered at the PRPC to this writer's knowledge.

VIETNAMESE AFRO-AMERASIAN: A child born of a union between an Afro-American and a Vietnamese. At this writing there are approximately 208 Afro-Amerasians in ICMC classes, or about eight percent of all Amerasians in classes.

AMERASIAN HALF-SIBLING: A major part of the Amerasians enroute to the U.S. are accompanied by their mothers and from one to many half-siblings resulting from the mother's union with one or more Vietnamese men. In some cases the half-siblings are

older, in most, however, they are younger. Both older and younger in the same family is fairly common.

FIRST ASYLUM REFUGEE: A refugee who departed Viet Nam by sea or afoot and spent from about four months to a year or more in refugee camps before being selected for entry to the PRPC and the U.S..

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In 1989 a year-long lull in the flow of Amerasians came to an end and the Center began receiving upwards of 300 per month, along with members of their immediate families under the U.S. Government's Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1987. Projections say that it will be at least two more years before the end of the flow will be in sight.

The PRPC does not train only Amerasians. Upwards of 50 percent of the Center's 16,000 refugees are from first asylum camps scattered around S.E. Asia, and are almost all Vietnamese. (A hand-full of Laotians and Cambodians are hardly a noticeable presence in the Center at this writing.)

When J. Kirk Felsman, Ed.D., a professor of child psychology at the Dartmouth Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, and colleagues began their study (Felsman, 1987) of Amerasians professional literature on Amerasians was almost non-existent. What little writing that existed was, in the words of the Felsman,et al, study's annotated bibliography, "...largely journalistic and/or anecdotal. Unfortunately, much of this

common misconceptions."

Thanks to Felsman, et al, considerably more quantitative as well as qualitative information is known. In spite of the study however, gross amounts is yet to be known toward educationally and in counseling, serving this unique refugee population.

Nowhere in the world is information more readily available than at the PRPC. Virtually every Vietnamese Amerasian bound for the U.S. passes through the Center, from the least among them to the most impressive. One finds working with them and studying them that there is a vast spectrum of differences in the "group", despite the tendency to generalize about them.

Not only is much of the information about them rather easily accessed at the PRPC, the primary purpose of their stay at the Center is for them to study and hence better prepare for entry into U.S. society and culture. There is perhaps no sub-group at the Center with a greater need for the Center and what it offers. Amerasians are young, most are confused about what their nationality, culture and future really is. Moving them at least closer to an ability to cope with and enter mainstream America proves the value of the Center if it is not proven in any other way.

Despite the differences between Amerasians as individuals, there are important generalizations that can be made on the basis of demographic data, generalizations that, at the minimum, have

important implications for those who teach and work with them now and in the future that is their's in the United States.

At this writing (March, 1990) the youngest Amerasian in the PRPC is 14 years old, and rapidly nearing 15 years old. The end of the Viet Nam war is put at April 29, 1975. In theory then, the last possibly Amerasian conceived would have been born in late January, 1976. One year from today the youngest Amerasian will be 15, nearing 16 years old.

The mean age of Amerasians at the PRPC currently is about 18.8 years with a range between 14 and about 34 years. (The official records can be imprecise on ages. One woman now in the Center is listed as an Amerasian at 43; possible but improbable.)

At the PRPC all young people between 11.5 years and 16.5 years attend the Preparation for American Secondary Schools (PASS) prgram, which is a simulated American secondary school teaching English, culture, math, sports and a number of elective classes, all but the culture classes emphasizing English language skills. The culture classes (American Studies) make use of interpreters for ease of conceptualization. As with students in adult classes, PASS students are in class a total of 18 weeks.

All migrants 17 to 55 years, including most Amerasians, study English, culture and English for the workplace. Both PASS and adult students are tested for English language ability and native language literacy prior to placement in commensurate class groupings. All are tested with the English Placement Test (EPT) developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in

Washington, D.C.. The EPT is a testing instrument for gross placement, not finite testing of ability. The native language literacy element of the EPT is equally for gross placement, not finite measurement of literacy. PASS students take a math placement test as part of the EPT; adults do not.

What follows is an attempt to create at least a bottom line of information toward assisting those who are now and will in the future be instructing and counseling Amerasians.

Working as a professional in the ICMC training programs at the PRPC and almost daily observing Amerasians in the context of classes, it is impossible to avoid arriving at certain hypotheses when comparing them with other, non-Amerasian young people.

With the exception of samplings of Afro-Amerasians, at least a half dozen different samplings, matched by age, were used to test these hypotheses. As well, samplings were taken among groups of young people arriving at the PRPC at very different times in order to avoid short-term trends in arrivals. The findings were consistent with one another.

THE HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Amerasian young adult students (17-22 years) have a considerably lower level of schooling than do their peers from first asylum camps. Corollary: Amerasians have been out of school longer than their Vietnamese peers from first asylum camps.

Hypothesis 2: Amerasians have a higher illiteracy rate than

do their Vietnamese peers from first asylum camps.

As an observer and participant at the PRPC this writer was struck with the impression that Amerasians almost certainly had a lower level of schooling on the average than their peers and, as certainly, a higher illiteracy rate.

TABLE I: Comparisons of adult Amerasians with peers from first asylum camps

	GROUP	Age	N=	Years School	Nr. Illiterate	Pct. Illiterate
1	Adult Amerasian	17+	614	5.5	62	10.1%
2	First Asylum	17+	214	7.7	3	1.1%

As hypothesized, Amerasians have, on the average, less years of schooling (two years less) and a considerably higher rate of illiteracy (9% higher) than do their peers from first asylum camps.

Hypothesis 3: Amerasian half-siblings have a lower level of schooling and a higher illiteracy rate than their Vietnamese peers from first asylum camps and the corrolary, Amerasian half-siblings have been away from school longer than their first asylum peers.

The assumption underlying the hypothesis is that the blood relationship to Amerasians worked against the half-siblings, that suspected discrimination against Amerasians would also be directed against the half-siblings.

TABLE II: Comparison of selected data on PASS students

	GROUP	N=	Years School	Nr. Illiterate	Pct. Illiterate	Math
1	PASS Amers	279	5.2	27	9.8%	20.7
3	Afro-Amers	34	3.1	15	45.1%	15.6
4	First Asylum	50	7.1	1	2.0%	27.9
5	Amer H-sibs	50	6.9	5	10.0%	26.5
6	Afro H-sibs	22	5.2	4	12.0%	19.3

It is worth noting, but not suprising, that PASS Amerasian years of schooling is not significantly different than that of young adult Amerasians (see TABLE I).

Surprisingly, TABLE II demonstrates that there is no significant difference between the years of schooling of the half-siblings of Amerasians and youths from first asylum, which disproves Hypothesis 3. The finding tends to establish that discrimination is a factor in the low level of Amerasian educational achievement (see Hypothesis 6 and findings).

The illiteracy rate of the half-siblings is, however, the same as that of Amerasians and significantly higher than first asylum youths. What apparently occurs is that a high percentage of half-siblings stay in school considerably longer than Amerasians.

Hypothesis 4: Afro-Amerasians have a considerably lower level of schooling and a higher illiteracy rate than do non-Afro-Amerasian peers. Corrollary: Afro-Amerasians have been away

from school longer than any group of their peers.
Vietnamese Amerasians

As a participant and observer at the PRPC it appeared apparent to this writer that Afro-Amerasians, as a group were less educated that their peers and that more of them apparently had never been in school.

TABLE III: Comparisons of Afro-Amerasians with peers

	GROUP	Age	N=	Y.S.	Nr. Illiterate	Pct. Illiterate
1	Afro-Amerasians	17+	87	3.3	15	16.8%
3	Adult Amerasian	17+	352	5.5	36	10.4%
5	First Asylum	17+	214	7.7	3	1.5%

As hypothesized, Afro Amerasian adults have considerably less schooling than any group of peers. As well, they have a considerably higher illliteracy rate.

TABLE III further highlights the contention of Hypothesis 3 that some form of discrimination existed in the Vietnamese school system against Amerasians as a group. More, one is led to strongly suspect that discrimination against Afro-Amerasians was even greater than against Caucasian Amerasians. A 1985 study* of Amerasians pointed out that many Amerasians and their mothers claimed that discrimination was the reason Amerasians dropped out of school early in Viet Nam.

Unresolved at present are the differences on TABLEs II and III between PASS Afro-Amerasians and Adult Afro-Amerasians with the PASS sampling having a significantly higher rate of illiteracy than their slightly older race-mates.

In testing Hypothesis 4, it became apparent that there were considerable differences in scores between male and female Afro-Amerasians, leading to adding the sex factor to comparisons on TABLE IV.

TABLE IV: Comparisons of Afro-Amerasians with peers by sex

	GROUP	Age	N=	Y.S.	Nr. Illiterate	Pct.
1	Afro-Amer Male	17+	48	4.4	10	20.8%
2	Afro-Amer Female	17+	39	2.3	5	12.9%
3	Adult Amer Male	17+	161	5.2	21	13.0%
4	Adult Amer Fem.	17+	191	5.7	15	7.8%
5	F-Asylum Male	17+	128	8.1	1	0.8%
6	F-Asylum/Female	17+	86	7.4	2	2.3%

TABLE IV presents considerable "food for thought." In years of schooling, female Afro-Amerasians have the least of all and have only about one-half the years as their male race-mates. However, the rate of illiteracy for females is almost half that of Afro-Amerasian males. One must conclude that a greater percentage of females began school, then dropped out earlier, since male Afro-Amerasians have, on the average, nearly twice as many years of school as females.

Female Amerasians, whether black or other racial mix, have a considerably lower level of illiteracy than males, which is not the case with their first asylum peers.

Female non-Afro-Amerasians have, on the average, a half-year

more schooling than their male race-mates, which reverses the findings for Afro-Amerasians and first asylum peers. No ready explanation presents itself.

Hypothesis 5: Amerasian and Afro-Amerasian males have a higher level of schooling and a lower illiteracy rate than female race-mates.

Experience in Viet Nam and as a participant and observer at the PRPC by this writer strongly suggests that there is a cultural bias for male off-spring among Vietnamese and that males probably have an advantage over their female peers in gaining education.

(See TABLE III). Mixed results were gained in testing this hypothesis when the table is examined. Males have a higher illiteracy rate in the Amerasian groups, but in years of schooling male Afro-Amerasians and their first asylum peers have the edge over females. There appears no reason to pursue the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6: Amerasians were discriminated against in some manner in education in Viet Nam.

The hypothesis resulted from being a participant and observer at the PRPC and is considered basically proven based on the findings on TABLEs III and IV and the discussions with them.

The consistency of ranking for educational background between first asylum, Amerasian half-sibling, Amerasians in general and Afro-Amerasians can only lead to the conclusion that some form(s) of discrimination against Amerasians was at play in

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Testing these hypotheses, given the abundance of subjects and availability of demographic information on official documents, generally proved to be rather easy, except for that on Afro-Amerasians. No notation on official documents states the racial mixture of an Amerasian. It was necessary then to ask Teachers and Teacher Supervisors of ICMC to visually identify Afro-Amerasians. Excellent cooperation was forthcoming both in the PASS and Cultural Orientation programs of ICMC.

It should be noted as well that needed assistance in accessing official records and some analysis of the data was provided by ICMC's senior management, ICMC Registration and ICMC's Testing and Evaluation staff. This writer is, as well, grateful to the Felsman, **et al**, study for pointing in the direction of forming some of the fore-going hypotheses.

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*The fact that Afro-Amerasians rank at the very bottom comes as no surprise to anyone who is acquainted with Vietnamese culture and the color prejudice against darker skinned peoples generally stated and demonstrated. Another study by this writer (Ronk, 1990) demonstrates that among mothers of first asylum Vietnamese and Amerasians the mothers of Afro-Amerasians rank at the bottom of all groupings as well. This could help account for their off-springs' poor showing but does not wholly. The fully Vietnamese half-siblings of Afro-Amerasians have much more educational background, in general, than the Afro-Amerasians.

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